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Reports from the Front Lines of Fundamentalism:

William Bell Riley's The Pilot and Its Correspondents, 1920-1947¹

William Vance Trollinger, Jr.

From the very first English settlement, American Protestants have demonstrated great faith in the written word, to convert sinners, to inspire spiritual growth and induce moral conduct, to create community, and to transform society. The result of this confidence in the Word and in words has been that, for four centuries, Protestants have inundated America with a mind-boggling number of hymnals, pamphlets, books, Sunday School lessons, sermon aids, magazines, commentaries, and, of course, Bibles.

When it comes to the first half of the twentieth century, one could make a very good case that the most important publishing endeavor was periodicals. In fact, given all the Protestant magazines to be read, one wonders how any faithful Protestant had time to hold a job, much less go to church. It seems that almost every Protestant denomination published a periodical, sometimes multiple periodicals. For example, in 1945 the Federal Council of Church's Yearbook of American Churches listed 431 denominational periodicals published by 136 denominations. While this clearly is not a complete list of periodicals -- eighty-eight denominations failed to provide the Yearbook with information about its publications -- the numbers here are overwhelming.²

While the established mainline denominations had the largest publishing enterprises, small, recently-established denominations accounted for many of these periodicals. For example, according to the 1945 Yearbook the Missionary Church Association, which was founded in 1898 and which had 5000 members, managed to

publish a periodical; so did the General Association of Regular Baptists, which was larger (22,000 members), but which had only been in existence since 1932. And then there was the Pillar of Fire, a holiness group that, under the leadership of Alma White, broke off from the Methodists in 1901; as reported in the 1945 Yearbook, it managed to produce five separate magazines, despite having only 4, 044 members.³

That these groups all published periodicals suggests the importance that even the smallest sectarian groups placed on producing and distributing their own periodicals. In fact, and as I have argued elsewhere, the farther one proceeds to the margins of American Protestantism, the more important the publishing enterprise, and the more frenzied the publishing activity. Driven by a desire to convert others to their understanding of the truth, determined to create and maintain community in the face of mainstream indifference and/or opposition, small denominations and new movements used print to survive and thrive in the American religious landscape.⁴

One powerful example of the importance of periodicals for groups outside the American Protestant mainstream can be found in the fundamentalist network centered around Baptist minister William Bell Riley. Born in Kentucky in 1861, and trained at Louisville's Southern Seminary, Riley – having served a number of churches in Indiana and Illinois – assumed the pastorate of Minneapolis' First Baptist Church in 1897. Within a few years he had transformed the First Baptist Church into a “soulwinning machine” (by the 1940s the church had over 3500 members). In 1919 Riley moved onto the national stage, founding the World's Christian Fundamentals Association; in the 1920s he spearheaded the campaign to eliminate the teaching of evolution in the public

schools and to remove liberals from positions of leadership in the major Protestant denominations.⁵

But by the mid-1920s the fundamentalist crusade had collapsed. Riley responded by turning his attention to building a powerful grass-roots network of churches, ministers, and missionaries centered around his church and, particularly, his Northwestern Bible School (which had been established in Minneapolis in 1902). Crucial to sustaining Riley's fundamentalist empire was his periodical, The Pilot. Started as a mimeographed student newspaper in 1920, within a few years the magazine had become a standardized, typeset monthly magazine, with Northwestern faculty members writing many of the articles. By the 1930s, its readership now in the thousands, featuring articles by Riley and other national fundamentalist leaders, and under the editorship of the Dean of Women (who happened to be Riley's wife), The Pilot had been transformed into one of fundamentalism's flagship periodicals, in the upper Midwest and beyond.⁶

For conservative Protestants in the Northwestern orbit, The Pilot was an invaluable resource, providing clergy and laypersons with Biblical expositions, devotional aids, sermon outlines, inspirational stories, and Sunday School lessons, as well as articles on politics, culture, theology, the state of American Protestant denominations, the fundamentalist movement, and, of course, the work of Northwestern Bible School. In all of this The Pilot was creating and sustaining a sense of fundamentalist community. Nowhere was this community more evident than in the reports and letters to The Pilot from Northwestern graduates engaged in "full-time Christian service." Ministers and evangelists in the United States, primarily in the upper Midwest, along with missionaries across the globe, wrote to The Pilot to testify to "their

work for the Lord,” and, in a sense, their work for W.B. Riley and Northwestern. As we shall see, these reports both confirmed and complicated the message that Riley and his editors sought to convey to their readers.

From the thousands of reports made by ministers and missionaries to The Pilot between 1920 and 1947 (the year of William Bell Riley’s death), one very clear and consistent message came through: to serve the Lord meant a life of almost frenetic activity. The contemplative tradition in Christianity was nowhere to be found in updates from folks like Harry Westberg, who in November 1933 informed readers that, as a missionary to the rural reaches of northern Minnesota, he regularly “preaches in three conservation camps, has four regular preaching stations, conducts three Sunday-schools, and substitutes for other missionaries occasionally”, for an average of “twelve services [every] two weeks.” The idea of a forty-hour work week was alien to men like Leonard Marquardt, who in 1943 proudly reported from Blackduck, Minnesota that he served as the pastor for “four Presbyterian churches” – leading “six [worship] services each Sunday,” not to mention youth group meetings – while at the same time having charge of funeral services in “three other communities” and “correspond[ing] with eighty young men who are in the armed forces.” Westberg and Marquardt were not unusual in their conviction that this activity in behalf of the Lord could be quantified, sometimes in quite specific terms. Describing his work in northern Minnesota in a 1936 report, Gordon Hansen observed that in a “field that extends over an area of about 2500 square miles,” “regular Bible study services” were being conducted “in twenty different communities,” 500 families were being reached by home visitation, and “sixteen Daily Vacation Bible

Schools were conducted last summer with an enrollment of about 300 children.” Traveling preachers accumulated particularly impressive statistics. For example, Albert Fuller reported in April 1939 that in the past five months he had “traveled 4,209 miles, distributed 425 Scripture portions and Testaments, [and] organized 2 Sunday schools” in rural Oregon. Two years earlier Frank McQuoid happily announced that he had just completed “an encouraging year” in northwestern Wisconsin, in which he “preached 155 services, made 209 calls, held 58 prayer meetings, and drove 9,169 miles in the interest of the Gospel.”⁷

There must have been occasions when Pilot subscribers found these accounts – with preachers racing hither and yon, and with the daunting strings of numbers – to be exhausting reading. Still, most would have shared the assumption that all this activity was pleasing to God, and the hope that it would eventually mean success in new converts and revived churches. And in fact, many of the reports (particularly those from the United States) were indeed tales of success, in which the fundamentalist pastor – through a combination of hard work, correct theology, and God’s assistance – had brought to life a “spiritually dead” church or region. Despite the passage of decades, many of these success stories were eerily similar. In April, 1924 Walter Bridge reported that while “the field [West Concord, Minnesota] was in a run down condition” prior to his arrival, his “preaching of the old time Gospel” had resulted in a threefold increase in attendance; twenty-three years later Von Elbert informed Pilot readers that while his Knoxville, Iowa Baptist church “was in deplorable condition when [he] first arrived on the field, . . . now the Sunday school has increased from four classes with an attendance of thirty-five to twelve classes with an attendance of 127.” But sometimes correspondents (perhaps with

flourishes added by Pilot editors) presented more elaborate versions of the standard tale of success:

When the present pastor [Allan Williams] came to the field . . . there was very little activity for Christ. No church in the entire county sponsored either a prayer-meeting or a Sunday evening preaching service. Very few people were even concerned about spiritual things. The preaching of the pre-millennial, imminent, and personal return of Christ was unknown. Today the Baptist Church has a well-attended Sunday evening service and mid-week prayer service, and the past year the church had two-thirds of the baptisms of the Southwestern Association of Minnesota Baptists.⁸

While reports from missionaries outside the States often contained the same sense of constant activity, they diverged from the home-based reports in that there was much less emphasis on success, in numbers of souls converted and churches “planted.” As we shall see, the explanation for this may have been a simple one, i.e., fundamentalists abroad often did not succeed in the way that fundamentalists at home did. But these standard accounts of fundamentalists overseas made up for their apparent lack of soul-winning success with an emphasis on the faithfulness, steadfastness, and courage displayed by missionaries. The most dramatic reports – and there were quite a few of these – had to do with the heroism of missionaries in the face of war. The most dramatic accounts came out of the Sino-Japanese War and World War II. For example, Clara Nelson wrote from Shanghai in 1938 that, while her mission was only a few blocks inside Chinese lines, and while she and her charges “heard the noise of the guns and artillery day and night . . . [and] watched the [Japanese] airplanes drop their bombs,” it was “impossible to move, as we have one hundred fifty homeless Chinese girls to care for,” and “so we trusted the Lord to protect us.” This 1942 report on the heroism of Mary Laughlin, missionary in Burma, struck a similar note: “When fifty civilians were killed in the railroad yards . . . [in a raid] 170 miles north of Rangoon, with cool nerve [she]

gathered up the wounded from the platform slippery with blood [,] calmed 69 children whose school principal . . . had been killed beside a railroad coach, wrapped bandages on the injured, and held flashlights while a surgeon amputated limbs and sewed up wounds in a tiny emergency hospital all the following night.”⁹

Of course, the opportunity to display personal heroism was not the primary purpose of fundamentalist foreign missions, and when World War II was over the editors of the Pilot deliberately sought to refocus readers’ attention on the primary task of saving souls: while “many . . . missionaries were killed and many were victims of the concentration camps. . . . , [the] challenge to the rest of us [is] to push out into these vacated fields” as soon as possible, and “not wait till the enemy has planted his tares.”¹⁰ In this instance, the enemy referred to was Satan. But correspondents to the Pilot made more frequent and combative reference to specific earthly enemies, in the process reinforcing the notion – central to the fundamentalist movement – that they and their readers were the community of the saved at war with forces of the damned. Interestingly, ministers and evangelists working in the United States and missionaries overseas focused much of their attention on two enemies frequently attacked elsewhere in The Pilot: Catholicism and Communism. Regarding the former, foreign missionaries angrily attacked, to quote from the January 1927 issue of The Pilot, the “Romanized paganism with its idolatry, immorality and superstition” that, in places like Venezuela, had created a populace “diseased in body and soul.” While missionaries were striving mightily to bring the Word of God to these “lost souls,” the Catholic Church had responded by pulling out all the stops to make sure that the people remained in darkness: Garnet Campsall reported from Ecuador in 1931 that “an unscrupulous priest” had forced him to

abandon his “work among the Quichua Indians,” while in 1935 Helen Brown Carder told Pilot readers that she and her husband (missionaries in the Canary Islands) were battling a propaganda campaign mounted “by Roman fanatics and priests, who are destroying all the Gospel literature they can find.”¹¹

Fundamentalist workers in northern Minnesota and elsewhere also complained about the Catholic Church’s efforts to keep Slavic and other immigrants in its thrall.¹² But they complained at much greater length about the influence of Communism in these troublesome mining communities. As Bertha Needham reported in 1925, not only did the immigrants “boast of their infidelity and Bolshevism,” but they inculcated their children with “Bolshevistic ideas and we [missionaries] bear the awful consequences of this propaganda”; put more pointedly in a later issue of The Pilot, “the children are taught to ridicule the existence of God.” But workers in the States not only encountered Communism in Eastern European immigrant communities: one fundamentalist worker reported from Kansas City in 1941 that “Negroes in the United States” had such little “knowledge of God’s Word” that “thousands” of them had been converted to Communism by agitators “who [had] received special training in Moscow” and who were “now engaged in our country organizing atheistic societies.” Still, it was foreign missionaries who had the most to say about this great enemy, particularly those missionaries who were in China in the 1930s. As Gladys Lindholm saw it, the Chinese revolution was clearly a war against the Gospel: Wherever Mao’s forces go, their cry is “‘Down with Christianity,’ ‘Down with the foreigner,’ and ‘Down with the wealthy.’” For fundamentalists reporting from China, it was a struggle to explain to readers how Communism could be “triumphing in some parts of the [mission] field,” even in places

where churches had been established. Irma Day's cosmic explication was representative of how missionaries dealt with this issue in The Pilot: the "direct attack[s] of the enemy against our [Christianity's] forward move into untouched regions" has made clear to us that we are "wrestl[ing] not against flesh and blood, but against the hosts of wicked spirits in the heavenlies."¹³

Besides Catholicism and Communism, foreign missionaries – particularly those located in Africa and the Middle East – also focused on a third great enemy: Islam. In contrast with The Pilot's attention to (sometimes obsession with) Catholicism and Communism, the rest of The Pilot (and W. B. Riley himself) had very little to say about Islam in these years. In keeping with this lack of attention in the magazine, foreign missionaries portrayed Islam less as an active opponent of true Christianity (in contrast with what they had to say about Catholicism and Communism) than as a set of superstitious beliefs that held its followers in servile ignorance. Still, the result was the same, i.e., a host of people who simply were not responsive to the Christian gospel. As Clifford and Ruth Kencke reported from Nigeria in February of 1941, "surely there is more hope for the raw pagan" than for the African who has "had his spirit deadened by the spirit of Mohammedanism." Fellow missionary Albert Teichroew elaborated on the point a few months later: While pagans of Nigeria "sit in . . . dark heathenism, there are far more results among them from the preaching of the Gospel, than among the Mohammedans who have adopted so many Arabic customs."¹⁴

A number of missionaries made much of the fact that Muslim women were particularly oppressed. To quote Maynard Caneday from the May 1928 issue of The Pilot, "the women here in Morocco" suffer greatly "under the crushing, cruel treatment of

the Mohammedan religion,” which regards them “as nothing better than beasts of burden.”¹⁵ This concern for the oppression of Muslim women was striking, in light of the patriarchal nature of fundamentalism. In fact, The Pilot itself was filled with pronouncements admonishing their female readers to accept their subordinate role, especially within the church. As Northwestern Bible School professor and Pilot columnist C. W. Foley said in 1931 in response to a question from two readers: “It is as plain as anything could be, that a woman is not to take the oversight of the church, or publicly teach or preach in the man’s appointed place.” What made this so plain to Foley and other Pilot contributors was the fact there was no “Scripture authorizing a woman to take full charge of an assembly, and occupy the position plainly assigned to man throughout the Word of Inspiration.”¹⁶ There was practical reason for this divinely sanctioned hierarchy, given that women – Eve was but the first case in point – were “more easily deceived” than men, and thus much more likely to concoct and perpetrate “false doctrines.” While fundamentalist preacher Mark Matthews made the case in unusually vituperative language in 1940, the general point was one frequently reiterated in the pages of The Pilot: “the ‘female ‘pulpiteeress’ is an unscriptural monstrosity and belongs to the zone of ecclesiastical freaks.”¹⁷

Somewhat paradoxically, at the same time that they were being taught that women ministers were unbiblical monstrosities, Pilot subscribers were also reading reports from women ministers and missionaries about their work on behalf of the Lord. As regards women working in the States, these reports were more frequent in the 1920s and 1930s, perhaps indicating that, by the 1940s, Northwestern had successfully trained an “adequate supply” of men willing to serve as rural ministers and evangelists. But

throughout this entire period Pilot subscribers were treated to the accounts of the labors of evangelist Alma Reiber and song leader Irene Murray. Through these reports – at least fifty were published – Pilot readers followed Reiber and Murray on their travels from fundamentalist church to fundamentalist church in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Michigan, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. As Reiber reported in 1928, “our work has taken us to the little country churches, the city missions, and the larger city churches, but wherever we have gone we have found the need of the human heart to be the same.” Sometimes the news included reference to their soulwinning success, even among adult males: “at Maynard [Minnesota] blessings were again showered upon the people and many found the Lord, among them heads of families.”¹⁸ Perhaps some fundamentalist readers found a way to square the articles on female submission with the existence of successful fundamentalist evangelists who happened to be women, on the grounds that these women were in a church for such a brief time that they did not have time or opportunity to “usurp authority” from men. But this argument was never made in The Pilot. Moreover, and as Reiber and Murray frequently reported, much of their work involved supplying pulpits for months at a time. For example, in the January, 1943 Pilot readers were informed that they “will be supplying the church [in Peru, Nebraska] for some months” while also “engaged in evangelistic meetings . . . in that vicinity.”¹⁹

Not to put too fine a point on it, the editors of The Pilot made no effort to adapt the magazine’s fundamentalist theology to the realities of women in the pulpit. It is possible that this can be explained by the fact that, at the end of the day, spreading the Gospel was more important to Riley and his fundamentalist compatriots than maintaining the doctrinal line on female submission. This certainly seems to have been the case when

it came to overseas workers. While Reiber and Murray were certainly not the only women to report to The Pilot from stations in the United States,²⁰ reports of women missionaries preaching and teaching the Gospel in Asia and Africa appeared in virtually every issue of the periodical, offering what could be seen as an ever-present counter to the “male headship” message relentlessly preached elsewhere in The Pilot. In fact, and in an interesting contrast to their adamant refusal to publicly countenance women ministers, the editors of The Pilot never articulated a policy flatly opposing the notion of women serving as missionaries outside the United States. This was probably owing to the stark reality – reflected in the ubiquity of these reports from women missionaries – that, without women, fundamentalist missions boards would never have been able to fill their international openings.

Still, The Pilot editors did betray an obvious discomfort with the gendered realities of foreign mission work, best seen in the articles that employed appeals to Biblical authority and male pride to induce men to become missionaries. The April 1930 article, “Wanted – Some Real Men,” was typical: “To whom was Jesus speaking when He said, ‘Go ye into all the world?’ Not to women. . . . Does it not make you [men] ashamed to think that women must go out and do the work that you have been asked to do?” Only slightly more subtle was George Brown’s 1935 article, “Missions – A Man’s Job,” in which the author noted that “the missionary ministry of the Church . . . continues to rest largely upon the over-burdened shoulders” of women, despite the fact was that Jesus “chose twelve MEN” as his disciples, thus clearly indicating who bore responsibility for “the evangelization of the world.”²¹

More pointedly, there were admonitions from missionaries themselves to men back in the States – that is, male readers of The Pilot – to fulfill their God-given responsibilities. Garnet Campsall's January 1931 letter from Ecuador included a straightforward appeal to manliness that was reminiscent of early twentieth-century liberal Protestant appeals to "muscular" Christianity: "If you can't stand the dirt, the fleas, the lice, the persecution, stay home. But if you want a real man's job with glad knowledge that Christ is backing you up with every move just get down on your knees and tell Him you are ready [to go]." But the most direct challenges came from women missionaries themselves. Correspondents such as Signe Johnson (writing in 1940) were not subtle in their complaints: "on this stretch of territory [in Morocco] with its two hundred thousand natives there are five foreign women working at present, while many strong Christian men at home are cultivating their garden patches! Is it any wonder that this part of God's field (the world) is under cultivated, and the crops are poor?" Equally unsubtle were the two unnamed women who wrote to The Pilot in June 1935 from somewhere in Africa, lamenting that, while "our mission is crying for men, men, men, . . . they are not answering," which meant that the "gospel would never reach these people unless we . . . two weak women . . . preach it."²²

There is a sense in which it is difficult to know how to read these complaints and admonitions. Did these women missionaries really want men to take over the work of foreign missions? Were they trying – by lamenting the lack of men on the mission field – to defend themselves against attacks by fundamentalist critics that they were violating Biblical rules against female authority? Or – perhaps most likely – were they simply expressing frustration with the fact that despite all the verbiage about male leadership,

women were the ones bearing the exhausting burdens of mission work in an alien land? However one reads these complaints from women missionaries – and it seems plausible that women readers responded to these complaints and admonitions differently from men readers – the salient point here is that The Pilot conveyed a real sense of lament about the numbers of women who were serving as foreign missionaries (a reality ironically reinforced by their innumerable reports in the magazine) and about the lack of full-time Christian workers in general. These laments were not subtle: they were directed at The Pilot readers themselves, that is, at the fundamentalist community itself. Most dramatic were challenges from the missionaries themselves to fundamentalists to give up their lives of comfort to go into foreign missions, including this striking example from Helen Brown, writing from Venezuela in October, 1925: “I say shame, shame on the followers of Christ who care more for their stomachs, outward appearance, and luxury of pleasure than for the carrying out of His command and the salvaging of immortal souls.” In addition to these laments about the lack of fundamentalist workers overseas, there were also occasional complaints about the failure of ministers to accept pulpits in rural America: “We see many small churches with closed doors, in communities where hundreds of children are without any religious instruction. What is the trouble? Are we preparing for the ministry men who are afraid of hardship,” or have they been led “to believe that God always provides salaries that will provide luxuries?”²³

We can certainly read these complaints about too few male missionaries and too few Christian workers in general as reflecting a sense on the part of ministers and missionaries that the fundamentalist community was failing to live up to its responsibilities to the movement. But it is striking how often these fundamentalist

workers made reference to *their own* failures in their correspondence with The Pilot. While the periodical's editors worked overtime to present an upbeat, "fundamentalism on the march" narrative, the reports from ministers and missionaries exposed readers to some remarkably honest, occasionally painful, stories about the realities of life in the field.

While placing great emphasis on foreign missionaries' faithfulness and courage in the face of difficult, even terrifying, challenges, The Pilot carried surprisingly few reports about soulwinning successes. Sometimes missionaries were quite explicit about the fact that their work often had not resulted in many (or any) conversions. One wonders how faithful Pilot readers responded to Signe Johnson's candid 1929 admission that, while "I wish I could tell you about great results from the work done in Morocco," the reality is that "the stubborn walls of these Moslems" remain in place and "hence the harvest has not yet come"; or to Albert Teichroew's 1942 report from Nigeria ruefully noting that while converting the "pagans" was challenge enough, "there are far more results among them . . . than among the Mohammedans who have adopted so many Arabic customs"; or Alice Schleuter's observation in 1940 from the Amazon rain forest of Ecuador: "[W]hen one looks at these Jivaros [Indians] it seems like a hopeless task to teach them very much, or to expect them to understand the way of salvation."²⁴

But candor about difficulties and failures appears as well in some of the reports from fundamentalists working in North America. Sometimes these accounts concluded with the missionary bravely asserting that God "will work it out in the end," or that – to quote the aforementioned Signe Johnson -- "the Lord will soon answer our prayers"; sometimes the reports lacked even a pro forma statement of confidence in God's

For William Bell Riley The Pilot was a wonderful medium whereby the great leader and his associates could communicate with the fundamentalist network centered around his Northwestern Bible School of Minneapolis. For this community of believers – centered in the upper Midwest, but national in scope – The Pilot provided a plethora of written material. Most of the material contained in its pages – which included Biblical expositions, sermon outlines, and Sunday School lessons, as well as articles (often written by Riley) on the advance of fundamentalism in a oft-hostile religious and cultural climate – was written or closely vetted by the periodical’s editors, and was, almost without exception, “on message.” But in the midst of all this information and exhortations from headquarters were the reports from Christian workers in the field. The Pilot’s editors were clearly eager to give space to the news from Northwestern graduates engaged in “full-time Christian service”; this was, after all, what the school was all about. And these ministers and missionaries were clearly eager to let their fellow fundamentalists know where they were, what they were doing, and how God was working through them.

As we have seen, many of the reports “from the field” did reinforce The Pilot’s central themes: the model Christian is one who was engaged in constant activity in behalf of the Lord; fundamentalists are in a life-and-death battle with formidable earthly and spiritual enemies; hard work and correct theology will bring great soulwinning success. Yet, as we have also seen, some of these reports – especially those dealing with women missionaries and ministers, and those (generally from missionaries working overseas or in particularly unreceptive communities in the United States) describing the failure to win

souls -- were at odds with The Pilot's message. Sometimes the contrast could be quite jarring.

There is no question that the letters from ministers and missionaries published in The Pilot complicated what William Bell Riley and his associates were attempting to communicate to their fundamentalist subscribers. In keeping with the fundamentalist proclivity for military metaphors, one might think of these letters as missives from foot-soldiers on the frontlines, missives that sometimes contained information that did not jive with what the generals were saying. But while these letters *complicated* The Pilot's message, they did not, I would argue, *undermine* it. Yes, the reports from women ministers and missionaries suggested the possibility that they could preach the Gospel, inside or outside the States, as well as men; but in telling their stories, and in decrying the paucity of men in Christian service, they never directly challenged -- and sometimes reiterated -- the idea that men were the ones who should be preaching the Gospel. Likewise, while ministers and missionaries were surprisingly forthright in delineating their failures, suggesting a counter-narrative to the "fundamentalism on the march" *motif*, the fact is that they lamented not the failure of the fundamentalist message or God's failure to provide for them, but *their own* personal failure.

Of course, some readers might have understood these "complications" to the fundamentalist message as discrediting the message itself. For example, some readers (particularly women readers) might very well have understood the reports from Alma Reiber and Irene Murray as giving the lie to the patriarchal conceit that God wanted men and not women to serve as ministers of the Gospel. But while this is a reasonable speculation, we can not assume that readers, even women readers, made this interpretive

leap. What we do know is that the letters and reports contained in The Pilot sometimes challenged, but almost always remained within, the confines of acceptable fundamentalist discourse.

Of course, it is possible that Pilot editors received but refused to print letters that explicitly undermined and not just complicated the fundamentalist message. For example, there may have been missives that called for equality in the church between men and women, or that blamed the failure to secure converts on the mission field on fundamentalism and its painfully narrow approach to the Gospel. This said, to make too much of unpublished letters could distract us from what we learn from the letters that *were* published in The Pilot. These reports allow us a penetrating look into the hearts and minds of real live fundamentalist workers, in all their inconsistencies and discomforts and failures, in all their dogged determination to live up to what they understood as God's truth and God's calling. What these reports offer is a glimpse into fundamentalism at the grass-roots level, beyond the rhetorical pronouncements of the movement's leaders.

1. I would like to thank Peter Thuesen and the anonymous readers of an earlier draft for their very helpful insights.

2. William Vance Trollinger, Jr., "An Outpouring of 'Faithful' Words: Protestant Publishing in the United States, 1880-1945," in The History of the Book: American Print Culture, 1880-1945, eds. Carl Kaestle and Jan Radway, vol. 4, History of the Book in America (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

3. Yearbook of American Churches, ed. Benson Y. Landis (Lebanon, PA: Sowers Printing Co., 1945), 5-86. It should be noted that the denominational membership numbers in this Yearbook were not always terribly up-to-date; the Pillar of Fire numbers, for example, came from a 1936 report, and may understate the membership by a few thousand. Of course, membership statistics for church groups on the margins of American religion are almost always inexact.

4. Trollinger, "Outpouring of 'Faithful' Words."

5. William Vance Trollinger, Jr., God's Empire: William Bell Riley and Midwestern Fundamentalism (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 10-61.

5. Trollinger, God's Empire, esp. 108-125; William Vance Trollinger, Jr., "The Northwestern Pilot," in Popular Religious Magazines of the United States, ed. Mark Fackler and Charles Lippy (Westport, CN: Greenwood, 1995), 385-387.

6. The Pilot, 14(November 1933): 51 (Harry Westberg); The Pilot, 23(1943): 219 (Leonard Marquardt); The Pilot, 16(1936): 146 (Gordon Hansen); The Pilot, 19(1939): 214 (Albert Fuller); The Pilot, 17(1937): 247 (Frank McQuoid). For other examples see: The Pilot, 17(1937): 115 (Peter MacFarlane); The Pilot, 23(1943): 327 (Donald Haight); The Pilot, 26(1946): 239 (Elizabeth Mills).

7. The Pilot, 4(1924): 52 (Walter Bridge); The Pilot, 27(1947): 146 (Von Elbert); The Pilot, 23(1943): 239 (Allan Williams). For other examples see: W. B. Riley, "Rebuilding a Baptist Association," 22 (1942): 311-312 (George Siemens); The Pilot, 24(1944): 264 (Lois Thom and Cecile Clevenger).

8. The Pilot, 18(1938): 276-77 (Clara Nelson); The Pilot, 22(1942): 220 (Mary Laughlin). For other examples see: The Pilot, 10(1930): 317 (Jennie Wedison); The Pilot, 19(1941): 242 (Mathilda Anderson).

9. The Pilot, 27(1946): 47. This challenge was written in the context of a report from missionary Sylvia Cushing Sivag, who was "recuperating from [her] Concentration Camp experience in Borneo."

10. Helen Brown, "A Vision of a Lost Land," The Pilot, 7(1927): 7; The Pilot, 11(1931): 183 (Garnet Campsall); The Pilot, 16(1935): 50 (Helen Brown Carder).

11. For references to the challenges of converting Catholic immigrants, see: Bertha Needham, "The Harvest Fields of Minnesota," The Pilot, 10(1930): 119; "Northern Minnesota – A True Mission Field," The Pilot, 11 (1930): 86. It should be noted in these latter two reports there was much more concern about Communism than Catholicism.

12. Needham, 119; "Northern Minnesota," 86; The Pilot, 21(1941): 210-211 (Eva Jantz Blevens); The Pilot, 10(1930): 318 (Gladys Lindholm); The Pilot, 15(1935): 233 (Irma Day). For other examples, see: Esther Hokanson, "Communism in China," The Pilot, 11(1930): 79; "The Japanese-Chinese War," 18(1938): 294. The latter article includes an argument that, because of Communism, missionaries in China were at much greater risk than missionaries in Japan.

13. The Pilot, 21(1941): 147 (Clifford and Ruth Nelson Kencke); The Pilot, 22(1942): 355 (Albert Teichroew). For other examples see: The Pilot, 15(1934): 63 (Frank Shortridge); The Pilot, 9(1929): 21 (Signe Johnson).

14. The Pilot, 8(1928): 13. Josephine Bulifant reported from Nigeria that one of the tasks of the Sudan Interior Mission was "to rescue . . . Christian girls from marriage to pagan and Moslem men who would have made their lives one long misery." The Pilot, 15(1935): 170.

15. C.W. Foley, "Have You a Question?," The Pilot, 11(1931): 335; C. W. Foley, "Perplexing Questions," The Pilot, 10(1930): 319.

16. W. F. McMillan, "Have You a Question?," The Pilot, 15(1935): 143; W. F. McMillan, "The Question Box," The Pilot, 18(1938): 255; C. W. Foley, "Have You a Question?," The Pilot, 13(1933): 127; Mark Matthews, "Should Women Preach?," The Pilot, 20(1940), 319.

17. The Pilot, 8(1928): 13; The Pilot, 6(1926): 12; The Pilot, 16(1936): 246.

18. The Pilot, 23(1943): 121. One year later Reiber and Murray were still at the church in Peru: The Pilot, 24(1944): 117.

19. For examples of other women ministers and evangelists working in the United States who sent information to The Pilot see: The Pilot, 9(1928): 17 (Myrtle Gage); The Pilot, 10(1930): 183 (Sadie Busse and Henriette Rodgers); The Pilot, 15(1935): 204 (Sadie Busse and Elsie Parks); The Pilot, 17(1937): 153 (Merle Bunker); The Pilot, 19(1939): 214 (Vivian Ditlefson and Harriett Gleason).

20. "Wanted – Some Real Men," The Pilot, 10(1930): 196; George Brown, "Missions – A Man's Job," The Pilot, 15(1934): 234. See also: George Brown, "How to Interest Men in Missions," The Pilot, 17(1937): 137.

21. The Pilot, 11(1931): 110 (Garnet Campsall); The Pilot, 20(1940): 275 (Signe Johnson); "Women's Position in the Church," The Pilot, 15(1935): 271. For other examples see: Margaret Reynolds, "India Calls," The Pilot, 11(1931): 180; Mildred Dunbar, "The Russian Department," The Pilot, 27(194): 278, 283.

22. The Pilot, 6(1925): 9 (Helen Brown); "Workers Needed," The Pilot, 17(1937): 291. In a particularly melodramatic example an anonymous author chastised readers for their unwillingness to become missionaries: "Is it nothing to you? Through what special merit on your part is it that you were born in America, and not in darkened, sorrowing Africa; that the body of that Chinese baby floating down the river or cast into the refuse-cart was not yours; that you are not committing suicide in veiled Thibet as a remedy for despair[?]" "Is It Nothing to You?," The Pilot, 4(1924): 62.

23. For examples, see: The Pilot, 9(1929): 21 (Signe Johnson); The Pilot, 15(1934): 63 (Frank Shortridge); The Pilot, 20(1940): 117 (Alice Schleuter).

24. Ruth Genung Erickson, "Part of the Canadian Frontier," The Pilot, 10(1930): 240; The Pilot, 10(1930): 183 (Margaret Hendrickson); The Pilot, 13(1933): 243 (Rexford Smart); The Pilot, 11(1930): 86 (William Shillingsburg); The Pilot, 13(1933): 316 (Ralph Hill); The Pilot, 16(1936): 147 (Walter Radke).